

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Statement on the Death of Eliezer Wiesel

July 2, 2016

Elie Wiesel was one of the great moral voices of our time and, in many ways, the conscience of the world. Tonight Michelle and I join people across the United States, Israel and around the globe in mourning the loss and celebrating the life of a truly remarkable human being. Like millions of admirers, I first came to know Elie through his account of the horror he endured during the Holocaust simply because he was Jewish. But I was also honored and deeply humbled to call him a dear friend. I'm especially grateful for all the moments we shared and our talks together, which ranged from the meaning of friendship to our shared commitment to the State of Israel.

Elie was not just the world's most prominent Holocaust survivor, he was a living memorial. After we walked together among the barbed wire and guard towers of Buchenwald where he was held as a teenager and where his father perished, Elie spoke words I've never forgotten: "Memory has become a sacred duty of all people of good will." Upholding that sacred duty was the purpose of Elie's life. Along with his beloved wife Marion and the foundation that bears his name, he raised his voice, not just against anti-Semitism, but against hatred, bigotry, and intolerance in all its forms. He implored each of us, as nations and as human beings, to do the same, to see ourselves in each other and to make real that pledge of "never again."

At the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum that he helped create, you can see his words: "For the dead and the living, we must bear witness." But Elie did more than just bear witness, he acted. As a writer, a speaker, an activist, and a thinker, he was one of those people who changed the world more as a citizen of the world than those who hold office or traditional positions of power. His life, and the power of his example, urges us to be better. In the face of evil, we must summon our capacity for good. In the face of hate, we must love. In the face of cruelty, we must live with empathy and compassion. We must never be bystanders to injustice or indifferent to suffering. Just imagine the peace and justice that would be possible in our world if we all lived a little more like Elie Wiesel.

At the end of our visit to Buchenwald, Elie said that after all that he and the other survivors had endured, "We had the right to give up on humanity." But he said, "We rejected that possibility . . . We said, no, we must continue believing in a future." Tonight we give thanks that Elie never gave up on humanity and on the progress that is possible when we treat one another with dignity and respect. Our thoughts are with Marion, their son Shlomo Elisha, his stepdaughter Jennifer, and his grandchildren whom we thank for sharing Elie with the world. May God bless the memory of Elie Wiesel, and may his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

NOTE: The statement referred to Shlomo Elisha Wiesel, son, and Jennifer Rose, stepdaughter, of Mr. Wiesel.

Categories: Statements by the President : Deaths :: Wiesel, Eliezer.

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